

In the midst of the holiday hoopla, are you *laughing all the way* or *stressing every day*? While this season is known for peace and joy, sometimes it can be overwhelming and stressful even to the most seasoned Santa. What's in your Christmas toolbox that can help you be less stressful during the holidays or any time of year?

According to a Gallup poll, 29 percent of people find the Christmas holidays more stressful than enjoyable. Nearly one in four people find they have more headaches during the Christmas season than at any other time of year. (*Noel Botham, in The Ultimate Book of Useless Information*)

Stress is caused largely by our imagination. It can also be caused by a real physical threat, like an animal attack or hurricane. Stress is defined as the body's physical response to a real or perceived demand or threat. There is good stress that generates energy to meet our goals, and then there is unhealthy stress that taxes our mind and body.

Our mind doesn't know the difference between real and make-believe stressors. When we imagine the pain of losing someone close to us, our body will start to react as if it were really happening right now. In any situation, what we imagine about it determines how we feel about it much more than the situation itself does. It is not the events in our lives that cause us to be stressed out; it is the meaning we put on those events.

*Here are some tools that you can use when you feel stressed:*

Communicate your feelings to others. Communicate your feelings to someone or a community of people sharing the same experience. When people gather to support each other, the collective whole multiplies the benefit to the individual.

Practice heart-focused breathing. Practice breathing while imagining your breath passing in and out through your heart area or the center of your chest.

Pray or meditate. Prayer and meditation help quiet the mind and can bring you new perspectives.

Open your heart. It is normal at the onset of a crisis for heart feeling to shut off, especially during the shock and anger phase. Imagine that your heart is filled with love and compassion. Visualize your heart opening to whatever is going on.

Practice appreciation and gratitude. Commit some time each day to sending authentic feelings of gratitude to someone every day. Genuine appreciation activates the body's biochemical systems that help to diminish stress and stabilize our minds and bodies.

*Affirmation: I am one with the Spirit of faith, peace, love, and joy.*